

Deaf Culture Question of the Week – Feb. 27 – Mar 2, 2012
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When referring to people who have a hearing loss which term below is preferred by Deaf people?

- a) Hearing Impaired person
- b) Person who is deaf or hard of hearing
- c) Person with a hearing loss
- d) Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing people

Answer “d” – Deaf or hard-of-hearing person or people is preferred by members of the Deaf community. See this discussion on this topic of referring to deaf and hard-of-hearing people at the NAD website referenced below.

With regard to the term “hearing impaired” both the NAD and the World Federation of the Deaf reject the use of this term. They state:

“Deaf and hard of hearing people have the right to choose what they wish to be called, either as a group or on an individual basis. Overwhelmingly, deaf and hard of hearing people prefer to be called “deaf” or “hard of hearing.” Nearly all organizations of the deaf use the term “deaf and hard of hearing,” and the NAD is no exception. The World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) also voted in 1991 to use “deaf and hard of hearing” as an official designation.” (Cited from NAD.org website:

<http://www.nad.org/issues/american-sign-language/community-and-culture-faq>, February 23, 2012)

But what about “Person First” language for example in answer choices b and c above. Isn’t it more sensitive to use phrases like “person who is deaf” rather than to say deaf person?

Actually no. The use of “person first” language developed within the “disability services community” with the intention of focusing on the person rather than on the disability. Some groups of disabled people may prefer this. However, Deaf people don’t consider themselves to be disabled. They view being deaf as belonging to a unique culture with its own language, American Sign Language.

There is no need to use “person first” language because there is nothing to be sensitive about.

“Person first” language is somewhat ironic anyway. The intention is to refer to individuals with disabilities as “people first” and not to focus on the disability. But in the act of using that terminology the focus is on the disability. At the moment the person who will use the term “person who is x” he or she is thinking about the disability as a negative aspect. Otherwise there would be no need to use this euphemistic language. In the act of using “person first” language the person is in essence considering the disability to be negative and trying to be sensitive about it by using a “politically correct” phrase.

Regardless, when it comes to deaf people “people first” language is not preferred. Deaf people overwhelmingly prefer to refer to themselves as deaf or hard of hearing and when referring to the entire community to use the phrase deaf and hard-of-hearing people. There is no offense and no need to be sensitive. Deaf people are proud to be deaf and to be identified with the Deaf community and culture.

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